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THE DAUGHTER OF ABD SALAM

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She was a beautiful baby and she was mine

THE DAUGHTER OF ABD SALAM

The Story of a Peasant Woman of Palestine

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FLORENCE MARY FITCH

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FOREWORD

Seven months spent in Palestine gave frequent opportunity to visit the Arab villages. There I saw the life of the people as it is today and as it has been in large measure for three or more thousand years. This story of Sitte embodies my findings. Every incident is one which I saw or heard or which was reported to me first hand. Every character has a prototype among my Arab acquaintances.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to the sturdy, simple fellahin who welcomed me to their homes and their festivities; also to Louisa Baldensperger, who has spent a long life among them, and to Hilma Granqvist, the Finnish scholar, whose study of peasant villages is yielding significant results. These women helped me to understand what I saw and give me confidence in presenting this sketch as true to the life it seeks to portray.

F. M. F.

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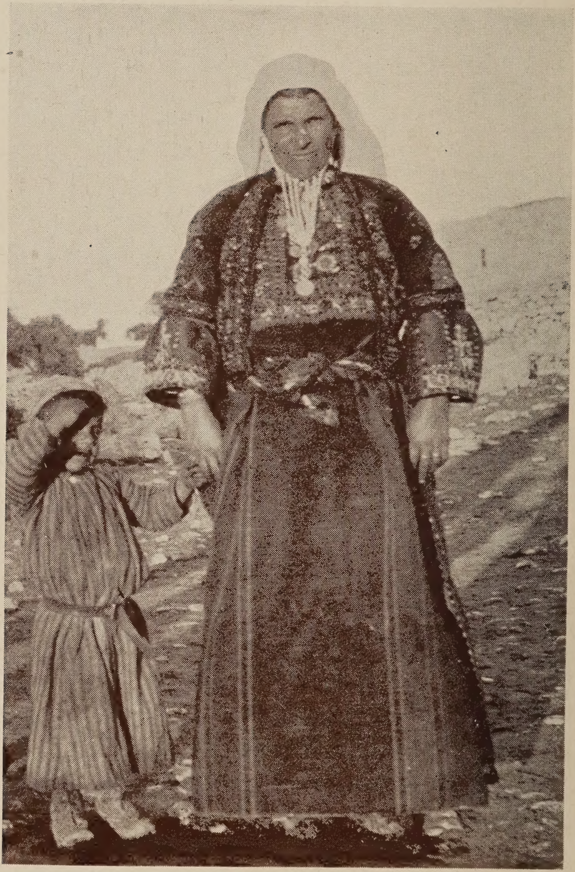
THE DAUGHTER OF ABD SALAM



Sitte, Daughter of Abd Salam

THE DAUGHTER OF ABD SALAM

I had gone from Jerusalem to Bethlehem by automobile, along the excellent highway which makes it possible to traverse the whole length of little Palestine in a day's run. Yet in spite of modern travel I was in an ancient land. On my right was the valley of the Rephaim, the giants of the oldest traditions; on my left across the tumbled hills of the Judean desert, the purple mountains of Moab thirty miles away were half veiled by mists which rose from the Dead Sea, lying low at their feet. And all along the way were storied sites, rich in age-old associations.

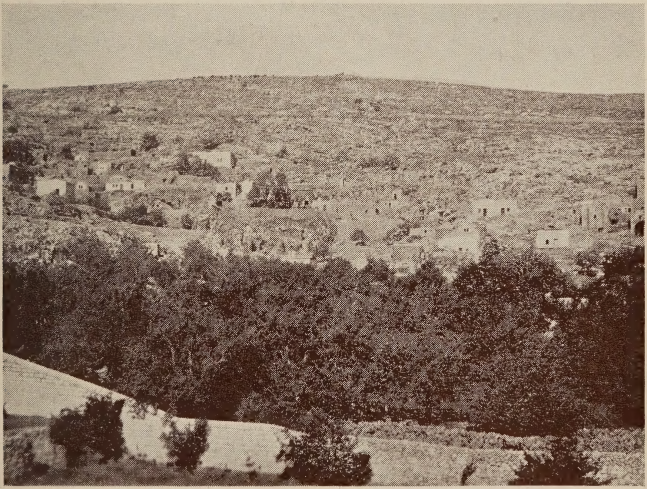
From Bethlehem I had followed on foot a rough highway, which only donkeys, camels, and men would attempt to travel. I walked between stone walls, thrown up to clear the vineyards and olive groves from the ever present rocks. In every direction I looked upon hillsides grey except for vines and trees silvered with fine dust, and across broad valleys where goats and sheep were feeding upon the dried stubble of grain long since gathered and the thorns and thistles that had sprung up after the harvest. Yet there was beauty, an austere loveliness of clear-cut contours, of light and shadows, of many shades of greys and browns and purples; and behind me the towers and roofs of Bethlehem crowned her hill. I breathed with joy the clear mountain air and gloried in the depth of the blue above me.

Of a sudden my path stopped on the crest of a hill, dividing into a half dozen faintly marked trails down the steep rocky slope that leads to the valley some two hundred feet below. And I saw a ribbon of greenness, where an ever-flowing spring and a careful irrigation system have made possible trees and gardens. I passed among the tiny houses, built on the hill-side, often up against the solid rock, and wandered in and out by paths we could not possibly call streets, descending all the time until I found myself at the spring, near which grew tiny ferns and clumps of lavender autumn crocus.

Another woman was there before me, one of the fellahat (village women). She was tall and straight and stately in her long loose garments and flowing white headscarf. Her face revealed such strength, intelligence, kindliness that I knew she must be a leader in the life of her little community.

She welcomed me with her cordial "Sabak il-khair," and after the formalities of an Oriental greeting, we sat together in the grateful shade of

Hillsides grey except for vines and trees



Tiny houses built on the hillside

a fig tree. We talked of the garden, the spring, and the sheep drinking at the open trough. Behind her simple words I caught the romance of centuries and impulsively I asked, "Will you not tell me the story of your life?"

Brightening eyes showed her pleasure as she replied:

You do greatly honor me, who am but a humble woman. My life has been a simple one. But gladly will I tell all you wish to hear.

I was more fortunate than many girls even at birth, for I had five older brothers. So my parents were not much disappointed that I was a girl, secretly perhaps even glad to have me, though they would not acknowledge it. All the women of our family were with my mother when I was born. One of them said, "She is sitte (the sixth)" and another added, "And little 'sitte' (lady) she shall be among her brothers." So I was "Sitte" and never had another name. We have no family name nor does a woman take the name of her husband. If several people in the village have the same name, they are distinguished by adding "son of Ibrahim" or "daughter of Hadad." Thus I am Sitte, daughter of Abd Salam.

My earliest memories are of riding on my mother's shoulder, sitting astride and holding on to her head. When she had a big tray or water jar on her head, I had to be careful not to knock off her load. She carried me out to the fields or to the tiny garden patches, and sometimes to the spring of living water; and while our mothers were filling their jars and cans, we children would wade in the water.

Our village is small, as you know. It has only four or five hundred people in about sixty houses. They are made of blocks of stone, frequently cut from the very place where the house is to stand. Most of them have only one room. The walls are thick, the ceiling is arched; the roof may have a low dome, or be flat, as you see. Sometimes there is an opening in it during the summer, which can be closed to keep out the winter's rain and cold. We love to go to the roofs on warm evenings. In most houses they are very accessible, for our hill-side is so steep that the roofs are often on a level with the path next above.

Inside every house is a recess in the wall where the bedding is piled in day-time. At night we spread the thick quilts on the floor with straw mats underneath. There are one or more large clay boxes to store grain, a big jar for water, a fireplace or brazier, and a shelf or two for our few cooking utensils. That is all we need; we are content not to have unnecessary things.

My little dresses were just like my mother's, and I wore a tight little cap trimmed with blue

The roofs are very accessible

We are content not to have unnecessary things

beads and other charms to keep away the evil eye. I was a proud child when first I had a scarf. I went barefoot as most children and women do in our country, wearing shoes only for special occasions or in cold weather.

As far back as I can remember, I used to try to carry things on my head and it was a great day for me when mother let me carry a jar of water from the spring. This one was small and had a handle and I held on tight and walked straight and slowly and was very proud. But that day was the end of my care-free existence; for every day of my life since then I have carried water up the steep hill by the rough rocky path to our house. Usually we use five gallon kerosene cans; they are cheaper and lighter and not so easily broken as pottery. I helped my mother in all her other work too. There were five younger children to care for, clothes to wash, bread to make, sewing to do, and much outdoor work.

I did not learn to read or write. No woman in our village knows how, and there is no school for girls. But I learned from my mother all that any woman needs to know; and I listened when the women talked and learned all about all the people of the village. But most of all I liked it when they told stories of long ago, when trees and animals could talk, and of the jin (fairies and spirits), or of our ancestors going back to Ishmael, Ibrahim's son, or of the great prophets, Mousa (Moses), Isa (Jesus), and Mohammed.

We children seldom played. We had few toys and knew few games and usually were tired when our work was done. But sometimes we would chase each other around the houses or out in the fields. And there were the village festivals when we watched our mothers dance and learned to dance with them. When we were old enough, we went to town occasionally and saw the interesting stalls and people in the markets, and had fine cakes to eat. I liked best the kind we call "eat and be silent," because no words can express its goodness, but my little sister always chose "eat and give thanks." And we ate our fingers; they were so delicious.

◆

We watched our mothers dance and learned to dance with them

We went to town occasionally

I have said that I was fortunate to have so many brothers. And I was, though there was more for me to do than as if I had had sisters. But I was only ten years old when Shaker, the eldest brother, was married and brought home his bride. Then she helped.

Such excitement as there was! Every night for a week all the men of our section of the village came to our home to sing and dance and smoke and talk and drink coffee. And all the women and girls went to another house and danced and sang. Then came the great procession and feast on Friday, and at last the bride was brought to our house. Most exciting of all for me was the fact that we all moved out for a week to leave my brother and his wife alone at first. Such a good cleaning as we gave the house before my new sister's chest and bedding were brought in! Then we went to stay with different cousins. There were a good many of us, but no Arab's house is ever too crowded to make room for more.

The second brother had died. When the third and fourth began to grow up, father planned a double wedding. It would cost less, he said, for one killing and cooking would do for both, and he thought if he took two sisters for the brides, he could get them cheaper. Then, too, it might be easier for them in our home if they were sisters and not strange to each other. So this time two more big sisters came into our family; only they were not much bigger than I.

◆

Interesting stalls and people in the markets

Father had arranged for my marriage when I was a little girl. For when he had bought other girls for my brothers, their fathers had offered to take me for their sons. So again I was fortunate; father could choose what he thought best for me. He decided to exchange me for a cousin, whom he took as wife for the brother next to me, giving me for her older brother. It was a help to father, for having so many sons it was difficult for him to get together money enough to marry them all. Then, too, father and his brother had fields adjoining each other's and this arrangement would keep the property together.

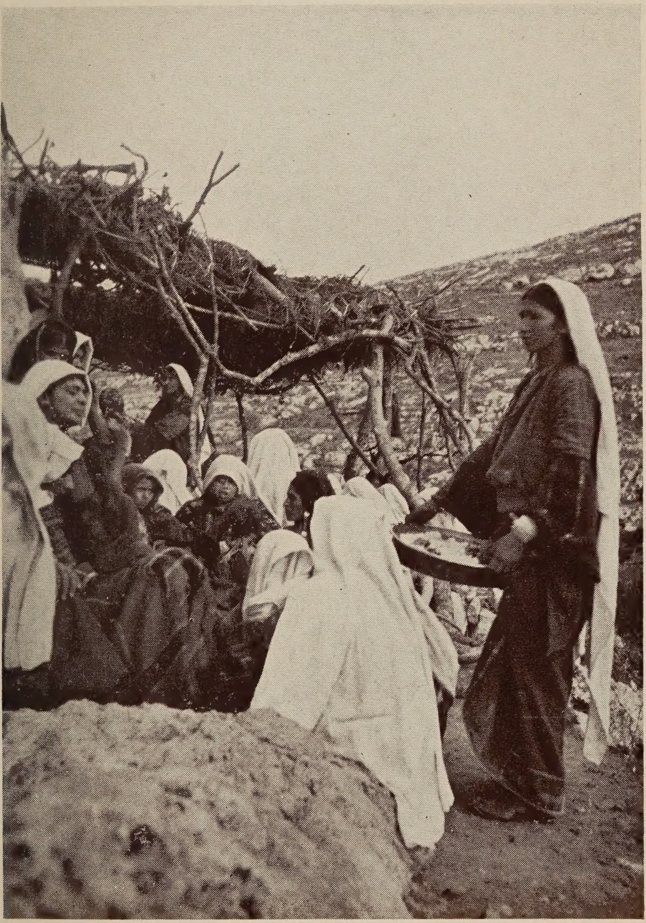
Of course I had known my cousin all my life. I liked him. He was tall and straight and fair. He had the very best name, Mohammed. The great prophet promised blessings to all who should bear his name, so I thought we were sure to have good fortune. Of course, it is much less exciting to marry some one you know than to go to some village you have never visited as bride of a man you have never seen. But I liked this way better. I wasn't so frightened. And at best it's hard enough at first, until you get used to it. All the women told us girls that. In Palestine we don't congratulate a bride; we give her our sympathy and wish her many sons.

As our fathers were brothers, they decided to have the two weddings at the same time; then they could divide the expense of the feast. This was when I was fifteen and Mohammed eighteen.

* * *

Shall I tell you about my wedding? First came the formal betrothal which we call "Tulbi (asking)." Father and my uncle each killed a goat and cooked it and ten rotl of rice. They invited all of our clan and other important men to the cooking, and everyone who had ever invited them. They gathered on the roof at my uncle's house.

When the women brought the big trays of rice and meat, the men began to ask, "Why all this cooking? What are we gathered for? We will not eat until we hear." They knew perfectly well,



Trays of food were brought to them to finish emptying

but they asked to give father and uncle chance to speak.

First my uncle said, "This food is the pledge of one hundred pounds ($500). It is proof of the agreement between Abd Salam and myself. Less shall not be given for his daughter Sitte. There shall be no dispute. You are witnesses."

Then my father spoke, "Be you our witnesses. All is clear for one hundred pounds. More cannot be asked."

And the men answered, "We are witnesses."

My father spoke again, "This food is the pledge of one hundred pounds. It is proof of the agreement between Shaktoor and myself. Less shall not be given for his daughter Shelabea. There shall be no dispute. You are witnesses." And my uncle added what father had said before.

Again the men answered, "We are witnesses."

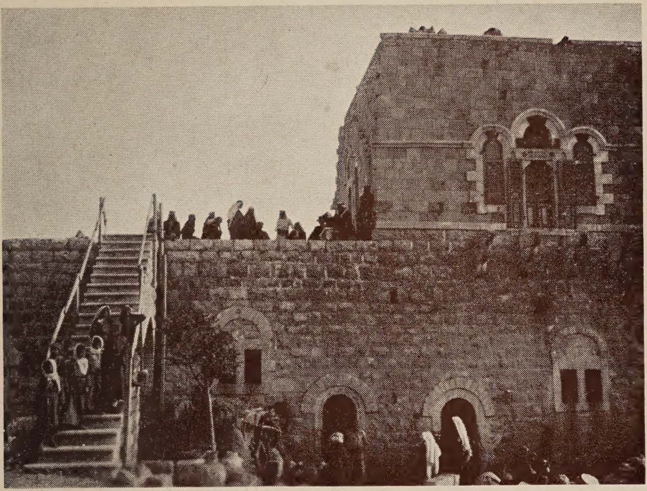
Then they all began to eat. When they had finished, they repeated together the first chapter of the Koran and dispersed.

The women gathered at our house had been dancing and singing and now the trays of food were brought to them to finish emptying.

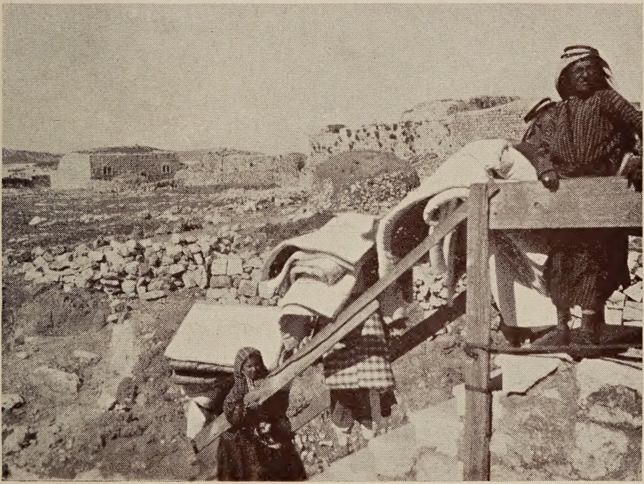
Our parents made several trips to town, and sometimes Hasan and Mohammed went too, to select the clothes they wanted their brides to wear. They bought exactly the same for both of us, so there could be no jealousy; for Uncle Shaktoor paid for the clothes for me and father those for Shelabea. You can imagine how excited Shelabea and I were when they came back, for when I saw the garments for Shelabea and all the coins to be sewed on her cap, and her necklace and bracelets and rings, I knew mine would be like hers. There were several changes of garments—enough for a good many years—and bedding too, a new mattress and two padded comforters, and a chest in which to keep our garments. Our fathers also bought materials for clothes for our service for everyday wear, which we made ourselves.

A few days before the wedding my father and mother, uncle and aunt, my brother, my cousins, and I went to town to the Imam, the representative of the Moslem Council there, and we took our oaths and signed the papers.

On Saturday night began the dancing and singing. All the men gathered at Uncle Shaktoor's house, for he had built a large room on his roof as a gathering place for the men, a kind of men's club. It also serves as a guest room for any of our family who come unexpectedly. It is used besides for village guests, for among us Arabs every village provides entertainment for any wayfarer. We never tell a stranger that we



A large upper room on the roof



Bedding was gathered from our relatives

have no time or no place. He may be an angel. The sheikh is responsible for the hospitality and calls upon different people to supply the food, dividing thus the care and expense.

The women were at the home of a cousin. I did not go, but I knew from other weddings what they were doing. The mothers of the two grooms would be the ones in front of whom and for whom the other women would dance.

The men made coffee, rich Arabic coffee. They roast it freshly until it is so dry that it is easily crushed to powder by the pestle. Then they mix it with sugar, pour on the water and boil it until the sugar is all dissolved and most of the coffee too. It is served in tiny cups and sipped slowly. This is our ceremonial drink. It is offered whenever we wish to honor guests. It is always made by the men of the family for they don't think women honorable enough to touch it. Yet they send a pot of it to the women's gathering.

Every night for six nights they celebrated. On Thursday night while the women were dancing and singing, some of the girls came to my house, among them my sisters-in-law, and others went to see Shelabea. They had boiled henna and they brought the dye and put it on my hands and arms and feet and legs. They made fancy designs with it, and held my fingers and toes in the basin until the nails were a rich orange color. I wish you might have seen how beautiful they were. We had a merry time over it because there were no older people there.

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By Friday every one was hoarse; only Shelabea and I had any voice left, for we had had no chance to talk or sing. All were tired, for every night they had danced until just before the moon set, and each night it had been later and later. On that morning came the killing and the cooking. Very early the women began bringing water, making several trips. The men cut the throats of the goats, draining off the blood as sacrifice. They dressed them and cut them in pieces, while the women took care of the inward parts, saving the heart, liver, and kidneys for food, and put aside the skins to be tanned and sewed up for

The women kindled the fires in the court

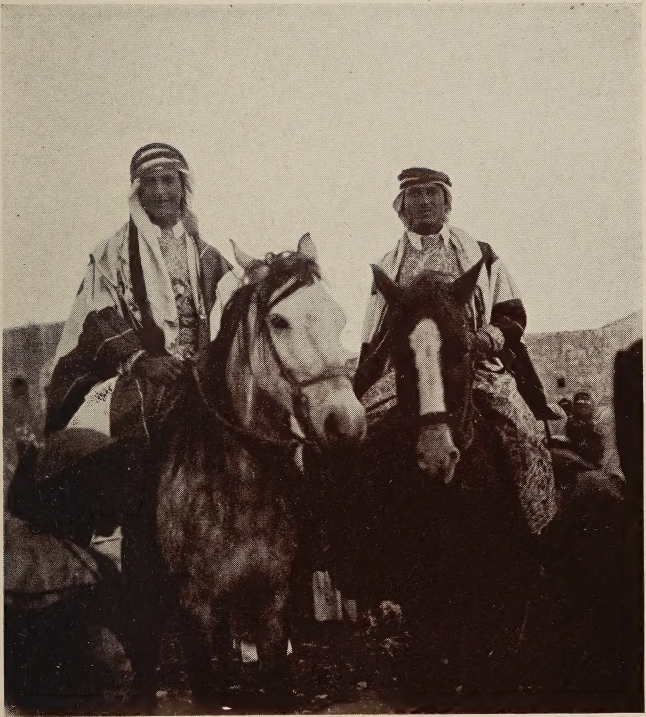
We did the cooking at both houses

water bottles. The women then brought brushwood, kindled the fires in the court, and put on the kettles. We did the cooking at both of our houses. Bedding was gathered from our relatives and carried to Uncle Shaktoor's guest room for cousins from other villages. Some of the men came on horseback, the women and children rode on donkeys or walked.

In the middle of the afternoon the fantasie began. Mohammed and Hasan had dressed in their new clothes. They wore long straight garments of soft white cotton cloth, embroidered in gold thread, and over these the abiya (loose long cloaks) of heavy silk, golden brown with wide white stripes. They had bright colored girdles, and white scarfs bound around the head with black cord and tassels, the head-dress always worn by the fellahin (village men) who are not the leading men of their families or clans. For the afternoon they both had horses, decked out with gay trappings, bright rugs on their backs, beads, tassels, and fringes about their necks and the harnesses, and beads braided into their manes and tails. The men thronged ahead of the bridegrooms, outlining a long oval space, walking slowly, facing backward or sideways, singing and keeping time with hand-clapping, while two men inside the circle danced, brandishing swords and waving large gay kerchiefs edged with tasseled fringe. The singers praised their bravery and prowess and wished the bridegrooms equal courage for their adventures. Sometimes they praised us brides, our beauty of face and figure, our clothing, our efficiency; you would not like all the things they said, our men discuss women very freely. The women followed behind the grooms, singing and clapping hands also. Most of the time they were wishing them joy, with a great variety of words, but with monotony of thought, rhythm, and tune. Part of the time they were praising the bridegrooms, then assuring them that we were very beautiful and fine. The wedding songs are always about the same, no matter how stupid or homely the people may be. We love to say gracious things, you know, and if they aren't true, what's the harm!

I had not been out all day for I must not get my feet dirty, and I must not be seen. But fortunately I could see from the window part of the way down the narrow winding street. And I was proud of Hasan and of Mohammed. Soon the procession was out of my sight. They went to a field where they could race their horses. I wanted to go; it is a pretty sight to see Arab horses at full speed, and there were several there.

When they came back, the boys dismounted at the court yard of our little mosque. The sun was setting and it was Friday, our sacred day. The



Mohammed and Hasan dressed in their new clothes

muezzin gave the call to prayer:

Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!
Allah is greatest! Allah is greatest!
There is no god but Allah!
And Mohammed is his prophet!
Come to prayer! Come to salvation!
Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!
There is no god but Allah!

The men washed their hands and feet and entered the mosque.

Meantime the women made ready the food, mounding the huge basket trays high with rice. On top of this they laid chunks of meat, lean and fat, and stood up in the center a long leg bone. Each carrying a tray on her head, they marched chanting to the mosque. At the gateway they gave the baskets to our two fathers and they passed them on to other men inside the mosque. Five or six men seated themselves on the ground around each dish, made scoops of their fingers, and very quickly had their dish two-thirds empty; they always leave some for the women. Then they washed their hands at the cistern. Coffee and cigarettes were passed and nargileh (water pipes) brought for those who preferred them. There were many dances with someone to play the pipe for music. The master of ceremonies then received the contributions made by the guests. As each gift was received, he announced it, praising the donor for his generosity and invoking Allah's blessing upon him. Mohammed and Hasan had to pay close attention because they must give at the weddings of any people who gave for theirs.

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I knew all this was going on, but had no share in it. Nor did I join the women when they gathered to eat the food left for them. I had bathed and put on my undergarment, slipped on a common dress, and combed my hair; and then I waited. The younger children whom mother had left in my care had had a little supper and gone to sleep. So I was alone. Finally a few of my young friends came and dressed me.

I could see from the window, down the narrow street

My long dress was of green silk, embroidered in reds. My velvet jacket was blue, almost covered with red and gold embroidery. They were made in Bethlehem, where the finest work is done. Then came my bracelets and rings, my cap heavy with coins and with the silver necklace which hung from it down to my chin, like a grey beard you might think, a long scarf falling from the head almost to the knees, and a red veil which was turned back, but later would cover my face. When dressed I was seated on a mattress on the floor against the wall and the women came in to dance and sing. Several brought large water cans to use as drums, others clapped their hands to mark the time. Usually only two danced at once, but many took their turn. I have remembered, and danced since at their weddings or their daughters'. So many times from my earliest memory, I had gone to weddings—and now it was my own! I knew well my part, which was to sit motionless with no change of expression to indicate that I saw anything or felt anything. After an hour or more, when it was dark except for the light of the rising moon, the beauty specialist of the village came and sat down facing me. First she blackened my eyebrows and under my eyes. Then she moistened her finger, dipped it into pink powder, pressed it first upon the center of my forehead, then on many other spots of forehead, cheeks, chin, and nose. Next she carefully unfolded a paper containing sheets of gold leaf, and stuck them on my face. The first fell over my closed eyes. When she had finished, my face was covered with these beautiful, glistening, waving flakes of gold, fluttering with my every breath. Then the red veil was dropped. I saw nothing more until my husband opened my eyes. But mother was at my left hand. That was reassuring.

She led me to the door. There father and my eldest brother took me in charge. Outside our little courtyard stood the horse upon which Mohammed had ridden in the afternoon. Over its head, a hen had been slaughtered to bring me luck. Father swung me up on to its back and put into my hands a sword which I held upright, straight before me. I did not need it, for father and Shaker were leading my horse; but a bride always carries a sword when she goes from the protection of her father's home to that of her husband. All the women followed us, singing and clapping their hands. The men were still at the mosque, safely out of the way.

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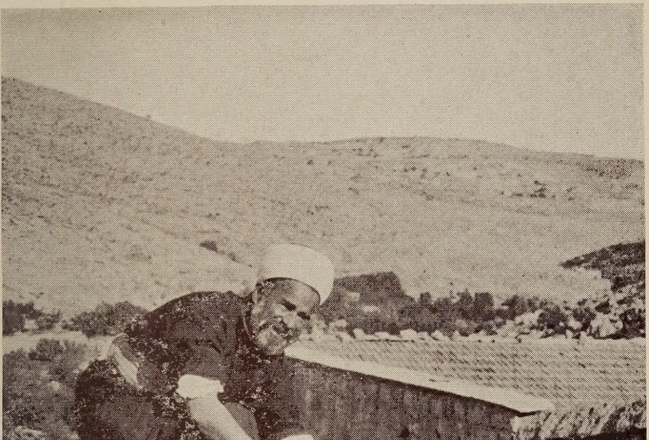


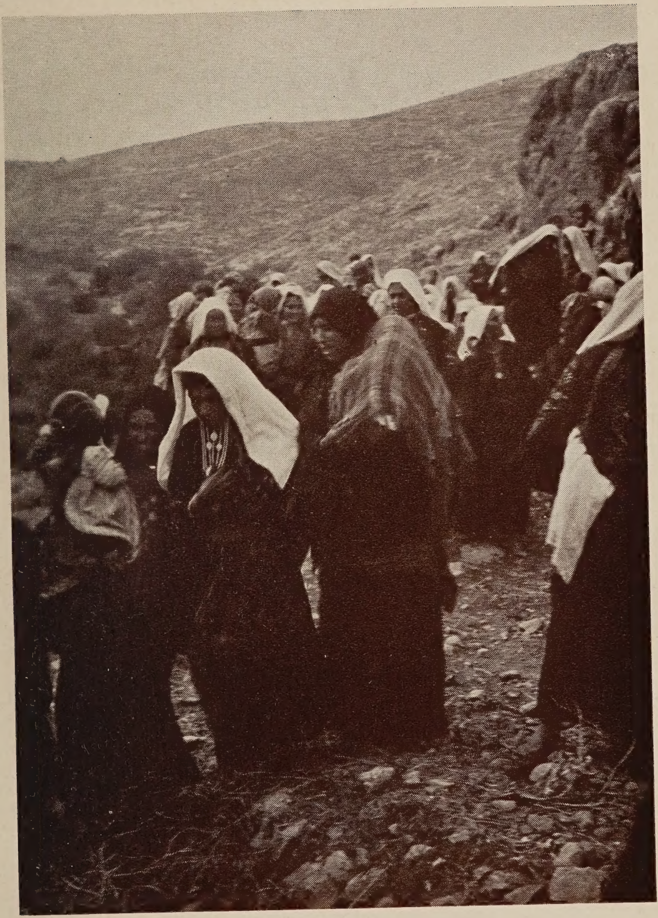
The men washed their hands and feet

At the door of his father's house Mohammed was waiting for me. One of his friends took from me the sword. Another gave Mohammed a handful of dough, which he put on the lintel of the door; then he placed my hand upon it and pounded my hand with his fist. This made the dough secure upon the lintel and gave it the shape of my hand. And there it stayed until time and weather wore it away. Another friend lifted a water-jar to my head, and carrying it, I stepped over the threshold and became a member of Uncle Shaktoor's family.

Mother was still beside me. She led me to the opposite side of the room. There my new mattress was spread on the floor and I stood upon it, facing the room, motionless as a statue. The women crowded in, but left open a little passage. Down this came Mohammed, the women shouting their song louder than ever as he entered. But when he stopped facing me, everyone was silent. First he took money from his girdle, one piece after another, and pressed each against my nose, saying, "I give you this in honor of . . . . .", naming some one of the guests who had given money at the mosque. Then he handed the coin to mother. She put them all into a red kerchief which she placed in her bosom to keep for me. Next he laid the sword across my head. As slowly as I could I raised my hands to hold it. Then he threw the veil back over the sword. The women sent up a shout at the beauty of the fluttering gold. He pulled a kerchief from his girdle and brushed it all from my face. He had to rub hard to get some of it off! It was not easy to remember that I must be a statue and not even open my eyes once. A girl must feel very trembly when she has never seen the man who is taking possession of her, still more terrified if she knows and does not like him. And I suppose it is exciting for the man, too, when he does not know what his bride looks like until he uncovers her face.

"Helas! (finished)" was the cry which went up from the women. Everyone left and I opened my eyes. Mother stayed a little while to help us. I had had no supper, but now a huge dish of food just for Mohammed and me was brought by some young people married the year before for whom Uncle Shaktoor had prepared the bridal meal. There was much more than we could eat then, so that I should not have to cook the next day.

When we had eaten, shaken the dust from the mattress, and spread the new covers on it, mother left us alone. I took off and folded up my fine clothes, leaving my long undergarment as night dress. Then my husband claimed me, and as he gave me the seed of our first child, he said, "Bism Allah (In the name of Allah)" and I replied, "Bism Allah," for if one forgets Allah



The women gathered to eat the food left for them

at such a time, evil spirits may enter into a woman and her child may be a child of the devil.

Early the next morning mother was at the door to see if all was well with us, if my husband was satisfied. Neighbors began to come with gifts, money, grain, bread, or other food. For a week we did only the work necessary for our food. Our families and relatives came to see us often. This was the beginning of our married life.

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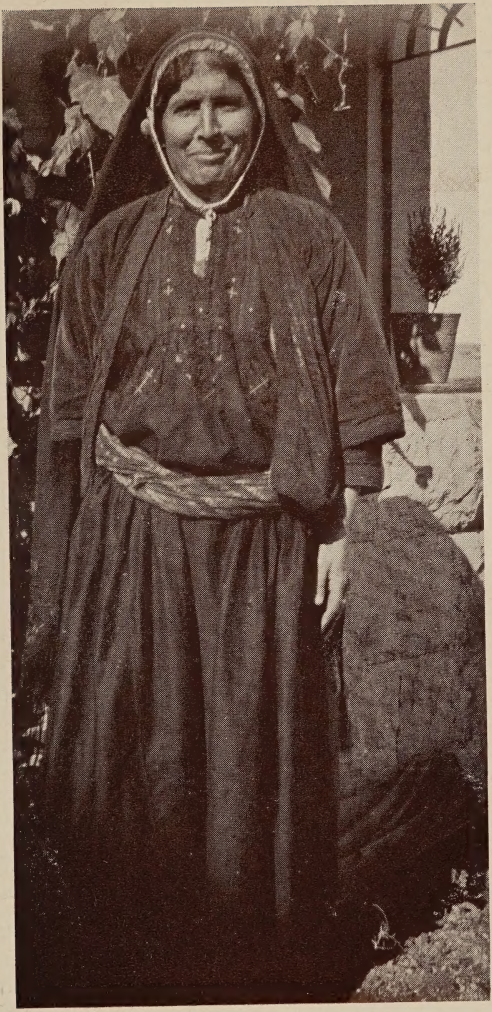
After the bridal week free from care, my new father and mother, brothers and sisters, and their babies came back, and life in the new family began. There were twelve of us in all. There was room on the floor for all our mattresses; and except at night, we were not all indoors at the same time until the cold, damp days of winter came. Aunt Sheikha was a good manager, and kind as well as efficient; she directed all the daughters. Being the youngest and newest daughter-in-law, I had the least interesting work to do.

Would you like to know our day's work? As soon as dawn begins, the men go to the mosque for prayer and then are off for the fields or whatever work they may be doing. So the women must be up earlier to prepare the food. Fresh quick bread is baked and this with figs or olives or white curd-cheese is the food for the day until night comes. The women used to have to grind the grain each morning; two at the mill make it go more easily and quickly. Now there are mills where we can have a sack of grain all ground at once in a few moments. Most often the men take the grain to the mill, with a donkey to carry it.

Then we go for the water, often making more than one trip and taking our clothes and pans with us when we have washing to do. The spring makes this part of our work easier than it is for



Aunt Sheikha—kind as well as efficient

the women who have to go two or three miles for all the water their families and house animals need. We never go to the spring when it is dark, for then the jin come to the water and do not like to be disturbed.

Next we start for the gardens, fields, or groves which are often some miles from the village, taking the children with us. A wee baby rides in a tiny hammock, swung across its mother's back and then hung upon a bush or tree. If the family is rich enough to have a cradle, the mother carries this on her head with the baby in it. He stays there all day, with a cover thrown over to keep off insects. Usually we carry food on our heads. When our hands are free, we spin as we walk, for the spun wool from our flocks brings in more money than does the raw.

One of our most important tasks is gathering fuel. We go long distances for brush, dried thorns, and weeds, anything which will burn. This we store near the mosque or at the weli, the shrine of our local saint.

Often we work with the men. So it makes a great deal of difference to us who our husbands and our parents-in-law are. I cannot think it matters so much to American women, you see your husbands so little and only once in a while visit their families.

Sometimes our work is different. Men plow and sow; women weed the fields and gather the grain; then the men do the threshing. The women care for the gardens, but the men take charge of the irrigating. The men shear the sheep, the women wash the wool. Sometimes the women and children shepherd the flocks, but usually the older boys and the old men do this. Most of us do not have many sheep and goats, so the different branches of a family may combine and select some one as shepherd, or even have a hireling. But that is not so well, for a hireling does not care so much for the sheep. Often the flocks must be taken a long distance and wander over broad mountain sides to find pasturage, but usually they come home with every sunset. Sometimes little lambs or kids are born in the field; then the shepherd carries them home in his arms or in a bag on his back and the mother walks close beside him, answering the frightened "ba-a" of her babies.

All the year something is growing in our gardens, for we have the spring and even in the long hot summer there is water. We raise cucumbers and tomatoes, gourds, squash and egg-plant, and many similar vegetables which perhaps you do not have. We have peppers and onions, broad succulent beans, and many kinds of greens. But best of all are our cabbages and cauliflower, sometimes so large that a child could not put its arms around a head. We pick them in the afternoon, put them on the roof of the mosque for the

Often we worked with the men

Brush—we store at the weli

night, for no one will steal anything from the mosque, and then start early in the morning for Bethlehem. By noon we are back and work in the garden again until dark, making ready for the next day. When we have a great deal ripe, the men load the donkeys and go to the big markets in Jerusalem.

After sunset we cook our evening meal, a big kettle of beans or lentils, crushed wheat or barley or rice, with green stuff cooked or uncooked, when we can get it. In spring we have the weeds from the fields, and sometimes the shepherd will bring fresh young thistles. They are delicious when they first push up their heads, tender and fluffy after the outer shell of tough leaves is trimmed off.

At the end of April comes the first harvest, pulse for animals and lentils for people, in May the barley, and in June the wheat. By the middle of June apricots ripen; from July to October come the different kinds of figs. The grape season begins in July. How I wish I could give you a big cluster of these large, luscious, meaty grapes! You would not wonder that Joshua thought our land a good one. The last fruit we harvest is the olive, which is ready in November. Then the whole family helps, the larger boys climbing the trees to shake the fruit down and the little ones picking it up. In the olive harvest no one grows tired, for the days are short. On our mountains we cannot raise oranges and lemons, but there are no finer ones in the world than those grown in Jericho and along the coast.

Some of the figs we dry for winter use and some grapes for raisins. Other grapes we crush to make cakes from the juice, boiled down and mixed with flour and pine or sesame seeds. You may have seen ancient wine-presses cut out of the rock, but we Moslems do not make wine, for Mohammed forbade its use. Oil-presses we have for making olive oil. It is hard work when we women do it by hand, but in some villages there are larger presses where a camel or a donkey turns the heavy stone.

Our family has a vineyard many miles from our village, and early in May each year some of us go out to care for it. We camp there until July when the fruit ripens. It is on the mountain-side, terraced partly by nature and partly by the hard toil of our fathers. It is fenced about with a thick stone wall to keep off robbers and goats, and has a high watch-tower from which some one keeps guard, especially at night. We do not train our vines on trellises, as is done in many countries, but let them lie on the ground. In the spring they are lifted carefully and a wooden support is put under them; then they are pruned severely and the ground is plowed and worked thoroughly. After this they are dropped on to

All the year something is growing in our gardens

the ground again. There is no rain to injure the fruit; the hot sun ripens and sweetens it, and late in the fall the rocks hold the warmth and the leaves protect from frosts, so that we have grapes fresh from the vines until December, when they bring a high price in the markets.

* * *

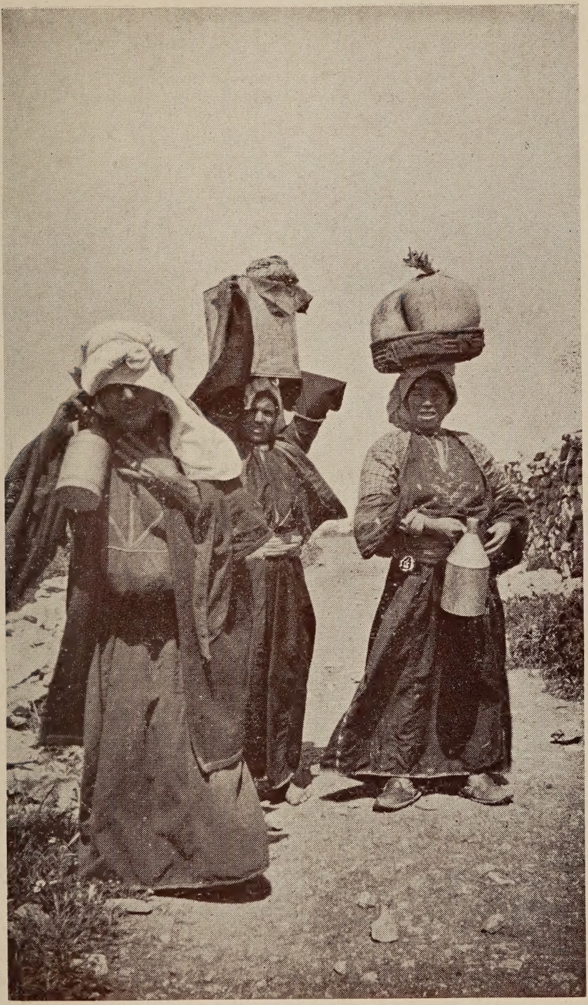
Life ceases; work never ceases. Even our short winter season brings its tasks. We make our bedding, quilts padded thick with cotton. It is cheaper to buy that and sell the wool from our sheep. We also make all the clothes for the family except wedding garments. Sometimes we hire a poorer woman to sew for us. There is much patching to do. A big patch of new unfaded cloth on the elbows or across the back makes an old dress or coat last a long time. We shrink the patch first, for no one sews a piece of undressed cloth on an old garment lest it pull out when it is washed, and a worse rent be made.

We fear the cold of winter, although we seldom have snow. Sometimes at dawn frost is scattered like ashes over our gray hillsides and the long rays of the rising sun melt it into sparkling dew-crystals. Many days there are heavy rains and strong cold winds from the west. Then we must stay inside, with doors and windows closed. Even though our stone walls are thick, the cold penetrates and all the heat we have comes from a few coals in the brazier. Wood is scarce and the quick fire of thorns and thistles and dried weeds does not last long.

In the winter there is much sickness, especially among the children. Colds, measles, and all sorts of troubles come, no matter how careful we are to keep our houses tight shut against the damp and chill.

Though we dread the winter for ourselves, we rejoice in the rains. When the early rains come, usually in November, the first water to fall upon the parched ground in seven or eight months, we women clap and dance as for a wedding. We sing:

I dance and sing; it is my duty.
Allah is merciful; it is my duty.
He sends the rain, to give us food.
I dance and sing; it is my duty.



Returning from Bethlehem

The heavy rains come in January and February. Then the clouds drop fatness.

I remember father asking Hasan, "What is the fattest thing in the earth?"

And Hasan guessed, "A sheep's tail." You have seen the tails of our sheep almost as broad as their bodies, so you know why he guessed that.

But father said, "No, try again."

"Butter."

"No."

"Cream."

"No."

"Then I do not know."

"Oh, my son! It is the rain in winter. But sun in winter," he added, "is like a blow of the pestilence."

In January the almond trees, first harbingers of spring, burst into bloom, feathery masses of faint pink. A delicate veil of soft green covers the bare mountain sides. Even the soil and the rocks seem to take on more color—shades of tans, purples, and reds. The broad green leaves of the asphodel and urginia push out of the ground. We know that spring is coming, that seed-time and harvest will return to the earth. But we know, too, our need of much rain if our springs are to last through the long summer. We watch most eagerly for the latter rains of March or even April, for they fill out the kernels of the growing grain and give us sixty or perhaps a hundred fold of our sowing. When the sun is half veiled with fleecy clouds, the children say, "The sun is bride today," and they play wedding. But their fathers hope that rain will come.

⁂

They went to a field where they could race their horses

A mill where we can have a sack of grain all ground at once

In my land every woman hopes to be the mother of many sons. She watches eagerly for the first signs that a child is within her. It was a glad day for me when I could tell Mohammed and our mother that our first baby was coming. We prayed for a son.

When the pains came upon me, all the women hurried to me. We know that when a little child is born, heaven is open for the good spirit to enter into the baby. So the women said, "Let us be quiet; let us have no quarrels; let us pray for what we will; our prayers will find Heaven open; we shall receive what we ask." They brought in a pile of earth over which I sat, and my mother-in-law was beside me to receive my child. My labor was long and severe. The women went for their necessary tasks but came back quickly, eager not to be away at the brief, uncertain moment when heaven opened.

One of them brought a Jericho rose. "This will help," she said. It was not a rose nor did it come from Jericho. It was a dried desert plant. When put in a basin of water, it began to open like a flower.

"When it is wide open," she told me, "take a sip of the water. Then after a while, another, and another, as long as you need to. It will surely bring your baby." And it did.

I watched it open, slowly, slowly. Then I sipped a little of the water, and again a little, and a little more, and before the water was all gone, the glad cry went up from the women, "The child is born," and they hurried out to tell the village.

Yet we were only half-glad. The baby was a girl! But she was a beautiful baby, and she was mine! We called her Rasmeya, which means "first class." She grew strong and Mohammed loved her and I forgot my disappointment. Before she was a year old, she was betrothed to A'hmud, son of Mousa, Mohammed's cousin. He was three years old. Mousa gave her a present and promised to give her something at every festival to keep her for his son; the formal betrothal was to come when they were older.

But one cold winter morning little Rasmeya sickened and by afternoon she was dead. I washed her little body. We sewed a fresh garment about her. Others dug the grave and we carried her out and buried her. The women said, "She was only a girl."

Mohammed had gone to the city that day. When he came home, we were childless again. He was kind. He did not chastise me for losing her but said, "It is the will of Allah." He comforted me with, "Our next child will be a boy," and again, "It is well for the parents when a little child dies. The child goes surely to heaven, and then it will want its parents so badly and

I hung prayer rags upon the sacred olive tree

plead for them so earnestly that when the parents die the door of heaven will be open for them too." And we waited with hope for the second child so soon to come. Do you understand what it meant that this one too was a girl?

We named her Atiyet. Before she was six hours old she had had three offers of marriage, even though girls are not considered worth much. Mohammed promised her for A'hmud, in Rasmeya's place.

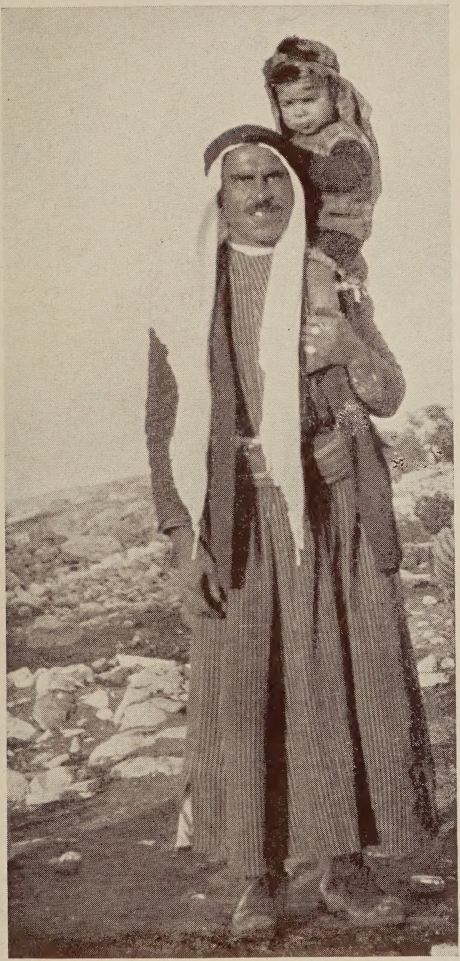
⁂

After a year, my third daughter was born. It was as well that she died at birth. It is much care and expense to feed many children; and we must have sons. Mohammed must have sons!

All the gladness had gone out of my life, all my pride. What if I could not bear sons? I went to the weli and prayed. I kissed the threshold; I took gifts. I hung prayer-rags upon the sacred olive tree. I went to Bethlehem to pray to Sitte Miriam (the Lady Mary), for though she is chiefly the virgin-saint of Christians, we Moslems reverence her too; and surely she would have pity upon me. And when I felt once more a new life within me, I knew that my prayer was answered and I told Mohammed, "We shall have a son."

When my baby was laid at my breast, I said to his father, "Let us call him Ata (gift), for Allah has heard my prayers and given us a son." Our neighbors shared our joy and crowded into our house with congratulations and gifts.

I made beautiful garments for my boy. Upon his little bonnet were many charms, blue beads, a bit of alum, a wolf's tooth, and a fluttering feather to catch any evil eye that might threaten him. About his neck was a string of blue beads with two silver frogs and a hand of Fatma to protect him. I even put over his hand a bauwasi, a triangular shield of fine bead work, all blue, the color of heaven. Now when we kissed his hand, he would not be in danger from jealous spirits. He grew a fine sturdy little lad. When he was beginning to run about and talk, his father would carry him astride his shoulder and take him with pride to men's gatherings. There



Ata, son of Mohammed, son of Shaktoor

was no finer boy than Ata, son of Mohammed, son of Shaktoor.

That was many years ago. Even now I cannot speak of how he sickened and died. Despair came upon me. I was twenty-one years old. I had been married six years. I had only one child and that was a girl.

"Mohammed must have sons," kept ringing in my ears. What would happen to me? What could I do? I knew that if I did not give him sons, Mohammed would have to have another wife. Men often take a second wife when the first is barren. This is all right when the wife has borne children and has grown old, but I was still young, and another wife, mother of sons, would despise me and take Mohammed's love away from me. The heart cannot carry two loves nor the head two caps. Perhaps Mohammed would divorce me and send me back to my father's house in disgrace. I should grow old, a burden to my father and my brothers. Whatever happened to me, Mohammed must have sons. It is necessary in our country.

I went once more, yes, many times, to the weli, and to the mosque of a neighboring town. I spent the night there in prayer. I wore amulets; I ate fruit; I drank potions. I borrowed the clothes of Jerade, who had many sons. I did everything which any woman ever tried to help her have children. Once more Allah heard my prayer. Unto us a child was born; unto us a son was given.

My neighbors had said, "Little wonder that Ata died! The very name you gave him showed how you loved him. And you dressed him so finely and kept him so clean. You might have known that the spirits would be jealous and the evil eye would fall upon him."

So we called this baby Shada, which means "beggar." But for me it had another meaning, the same as Ata, for had I not begged him of Allah and was not he also the gift of God?

He wore plain clothes, often ragged and dirty, with charms on his cap and about his neck. One of my neighbors said she would buy him for five millimes, and I added the coins to his necklace. Surely no spirit would want a baby whose mother would sell him for five millimes! To guard him against Lillith, the goddess of night, who especially covets baby boys, we protected the house with the scapula of a goat, for Lillith does not come near ugly things.

And now thanks to Allah! fate was good to us. Little Shada lived and other sons and daughters were born and grew, and our sorrow was turned to joy.

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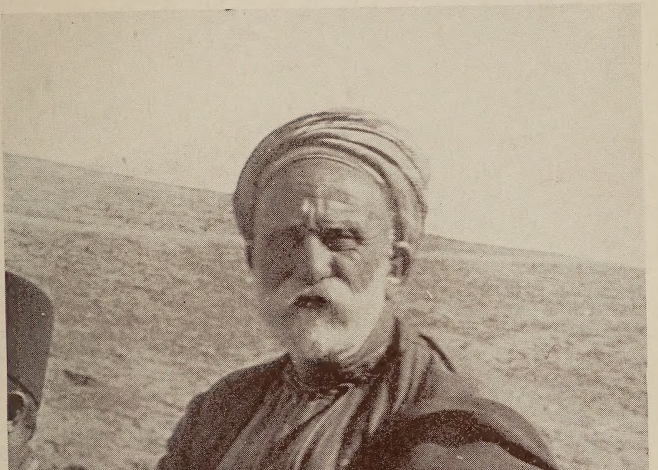


Old blind Shahim

The Jews always have their boys circumcised when they are babies. We Arabs also practice circumcision as taught by our fathers Ibrahim and Ishmael, but we often wait until the boys are older. Sometimes a boy is born who does not need circumcision; an angel has done it before his birth. A child so honored of God from his mother's womb becomes a very great man.

Shaktoor and Mohammed had said, "We will wait to circumcise Shada. There will be other sons." It was so, and when our third son was born, they began to plan for the circumcision.

This ceremony is as great an event as a wedding. Every evening for a week the men and women gathered, separately of course, to sing and clap and dance and drink coffee. On the fifth day, as I passed near the place of burial, I heard shrill crying and wailing. It was a mother whose little boy had died a few weeks before, uncircumcised. She was at the grave of her child, lamenting:

My child is dead.
It was my wish that I might make
The call of the mother of the circumcised.
It was my wish that I might hear
From the house of the relatives
The calls of joy and congratulations.
But now I sing the mother's song of mourning.

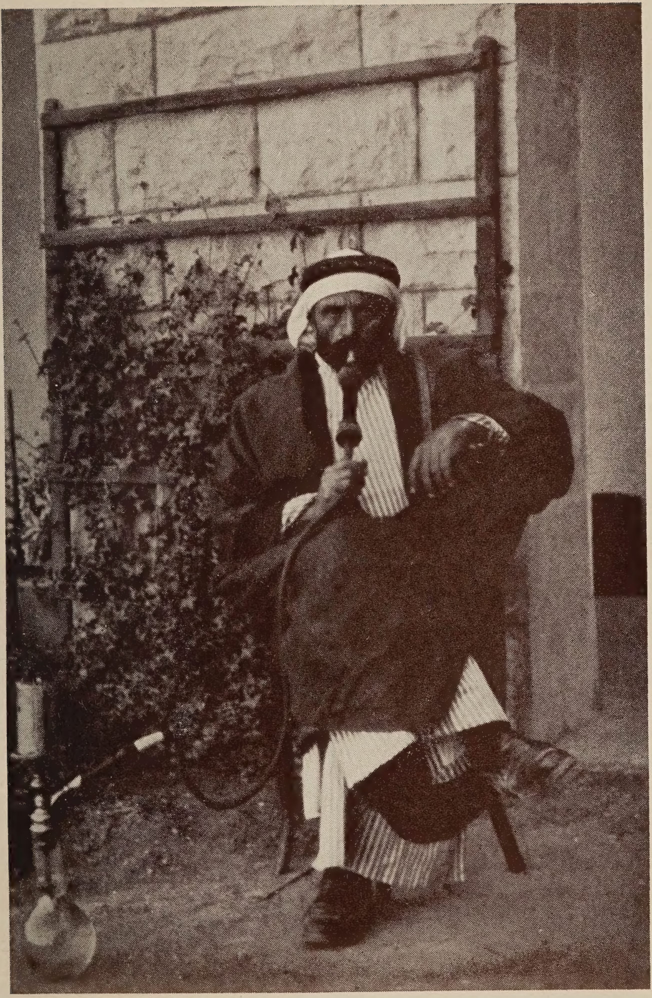
I remembered Ata, and my heart ached for her. Had I not three other fine boys!

On the sixth evening, just as the moon was sending its first beams over the mountain, touching our opposite hillside with light, I went to the roof of the house to make the call of the mother of the circumcised. It is not like any sound you know. We must practice years to do it well. My long sustained, varied trill rang across our valley, announcing, "We are ready." Then I chanted:

Hear, oh ye people, pray to the prophet,
Pray one prayer, yea, two prayers,
One prayer to drive away Satan
And one prayer to ward off the eye.
Thanks be to Allah! My heart is not broken,
My breast, which was crushed, has grown strong
  again,
And my life from Him whom the stars of night
  declare.
My heart has longed for this day, and it is come.

Then all the cousins and friends of our family came up or down the winding paths from their homes, the men to Shaktoor's upper room, the women to Aunt Sabha's house.

At the men's gathering, old blind Shahim played the rebabi and sang familiar ballads. He was the finest fiddler of our country-side. Replen-



Smoking—the nargileh—contentedly

ishing once and again the coals in their nargileh the men smoked contentedly on into the night, listening to his well-known songs.

At the women's gathering, I was the center of interest. The other women danced for me and I remembered each one that I might dance for her later. When I danced, they sang:

May your bliss last forever.
May you marry your sons well
And live always in joy.

Most of the younger children were with their mothers, the older boys with their fathers. But in the next house our cousin nursed her baby in his low net-covered cradle and watched other little ones asleep on the mattresses, whose mothers had left them in her care.

Early in the morning began the preparations for the great feast, killing and dressing the kids, washing the rice, bringing the water, kindling the fires. By midafternoon all was ready. The women gathered to help dress the boys in the new clothes which I had so proudly made for them. Upon their caps I had sewed many coins; we tucked into them ostrich plumes and fresh lemon branches. The women as they watched and waited, danced and sang for joy. Before we left the house, I too danced once more. Could I ever be so happy again?

Shaktoor and Mohammed had the horse at the gate; he also had gay trappings. Shada and Ismain were seated upon him, with their grandfather and father leading. Little Mustafa rode upon my shoulder. Then the procession started, the men ahead, singing, dancing, and blowing their flutes and pipes, next the boys on the horse, and the women following. How proud and kingly they looked! but half frightened too! The whole length of the village we went, and everyone came out to see us. Then back to the court of our house. Here was the circumciser. He is a priest, with authority from the Moslem Supreme Council. He is also a barber, and he had a fine sharp blade.

Mohammed took Shada first from the horse, carried him to the priest, and held him while the men crowded close around. The women stood behind, singing:

By Allah sharpen well your knife
And make your hand light.

He was taken into the house. Then Mohammed brought Ismain to the circumciser. When I had put the baby into his father's arms, I hurried into the house to care for my three sufferers. They were in pain and restless, while all the family feasted and rejoiced. But it was their day of honor.

Women gathered to help dress the boys

The horse at the gate

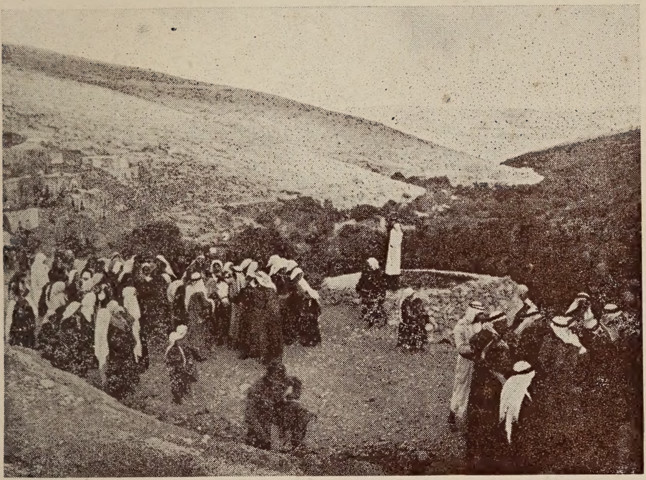
As our family increased, our father's house was not large enough for all the children and grandchildren. Abd Derwish, the eldest son, remained to care for his father and mother and to succeed him as head of the family. And Shaktoor gave Mohammed his share of the inheritance and built for us a separate house near his own. When the threshold was laid, Mohammed sacrificed a sheep before it. The blood flowed over the stone and in front of it. This was done to appease evil spirits, and to insure the favor of all good ones who come to live on such a threshold and protect the family against harm. We are very careful to step over a threshold, never on it, lest we shall disturb them. That is hard for little children; but I think the household jin do not mind very much when a little child crawls over.

While working on the roof, Mohammed fell and crushed his hand. He went to Bethlehem to the French hospital. The doctor bound it up and told him to return later, saying it might not heal and might have to be cut off. He hurried home in great terror. He prayed and vowed a white banner for Allah's face if he could keep his hand. The hand healed and in the concrete of the roof he secured a long stick upon which he tied two corners of a large white cloth. Nothing touched it except wind and rain. Even to the last shreds it proclaimed our thanksgiving.

When the house was finished, we hung over the doorway a triangle of alum, a looking-glass, large blue beads, and a blue bracelet with a black ostrich feather run through it, sure that these would attract the dangerous attention of any evil spirit.

Now began for us a more independent life. All the work of the house, the care of the children, the toil of the gardens, the fields, the vineyard, and the olive groves, kept me busy. Atiyet was my constant companion and helper. The little boys began to work in the fields and groves as soon as they were old enough. I never ask them to bring water or help in the garden. That is women's work. Part of the year they went to school to learn to read and to figure and to memorize the Koran.

Though we are busy, we do not rush as do wild beasts. However much you hurry, more than your fortune you will not gain, and no man ever reaches his goal. One of my neighbors, planning to get to market early and have the best chance to sell, started before dawn for Bethlehem with her donkey loaded with tomatoes. The donkey slipped and fell and spilled the tomatoes. When the rest of us passed her, she was picking up the crushed and dirty fruit, and she sold it cheap and with shame. So little does it pay to hurry.



The men ahead—blowing their flutes and pipes

The mosque of a neighboring town

When the day is over, we spread our mats and lie down to rest. Then we pray:

In the name of Allah, most merciful,
Whose name is above every name,
I stretch myself under thy covering, O my Lord.
I lay my right side down and depend upon my Lord, Most Wise,
Protect me, Lord, from Satan the powerful.
I lay my left side down and depend upon Thee,
Who hast created the night and the day.
I lay down my head and my shoulder and depend upon the Lord, my Healer.
My Lord, forgive how I have walked, how I have sinned.
Oh sacred enclosure, and house of God,
Oh Isa and Mousa, speak for me;
And Mohammed, the prophet of Allah.

◆

One day the routine was interrupted. My father became very ill. All of our clan were troubled. Uncle Shaktoor and the heads of three other families of relatives made vows: one to El Khudr (St. George), whose shrine is near us; one to Nebi Mousa (the prophet Moses), whose tomb is near the Jordan; one to the tomb of Nebi Dahoud (David) in Jerusalem; and the fourth to the tomb of Ibrahim and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekkah, Jakub and Leah, in Hebron. When he recovered, the first cousin went at once to El Khudr, taking a fine fat yearling of his flock. There he killed it in the court and cooked it in the kitchen of the church, inviting all the men of the village to eat, and sending what was left to their homes. Many poor people go to live near El Khudr, for they often receive such food. The other sacrifices were made later; of Nebi Mousa I shall tell you more.

Several years had passed when Mohammed's father Shaktoor died so suddenly that there was no time for prayers and vows to save him.

Burial always follows death at once, lest the land be defiled and lest the dead man be unprepared when Naker and Niker, the examining angels, come to his grave to inquire concerning his good and bad deeds.

Abd Derwish washed his body and sewed it in the fresh shroud which a neighbor woman had made for us. The cap, face-covering, and apron were of green cloth, the coat and the outer covering were of white.

Meanwhile other relatives were making ready the grave, with stone slabs below and on each side and others to place above, that the earth might not touch the body and that there might be space for the entrance of Naker and Niker when they should come.

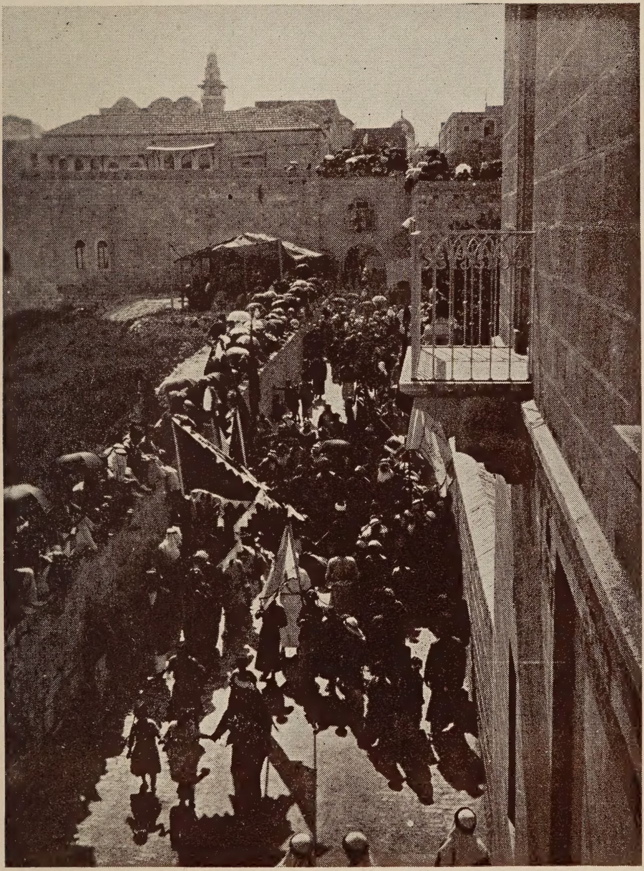
Still others were preparing the funeral supper for all who might come to show sympathy. Shaktoor was so honorable a man that many came even from other villages. And very many sheep and goats were slaughtered. There was much to do, but everyone was ready to help. One of the surest ways to lay up merit is service for the dead.

He was borne to the grave on a bier with a rich covering over him. All the men of the village accompanied, chanting the funeral dirge. The procession stopped at the mosque for prayer, where the katib read portions of the Koran about the journey to the real home. Then it moved on to the grave.

After the men had returned to Shaktoor's home, while the relatives and guests were eating in his large upper room, we women went to the grave to lament. Early the next day we visited the place again to mourn and to rehearse Shaktoor's good deeds. On the second Thursday, we made oil-cakes for him, giving them in his name to all who came, and so giving to him. On the hundredth day we had another feast in his honor. A year later we again made a death meal for his soul, inviting all the village. And each year on the last day of Ramadan, every son goes to the grave of his father and kneels toward the south, toward Mecca, to read the Koran and to pray.

◆

Ramadan is the month of fasting. Because we have a moon-year, it does not always come at the same season. During this month, no man may taste food or water from an hour before sunrise until sunset. We women must have a big meal ready before daybreak and again when darkness falls. And often the men eat again at midnight. If they can sleep in the daytime, it is not very



Village groups enter—carrying banners

hard to keep the fast. It is good when Ramadan comes in the winter when days are short and cool and there is not much work.

During Ramadan there is much prayer. And this is the time when we remember the poor. The head of each family gives the prescribed measure of wheat or barley and salt. The blind receive first; then others who are disabled; then the fatherless and widows. One gives first to the needy of his own family, but the sheikh supervises the gifts to make sure that each does his share and that those who have none to provide for them shall not lack. At this time they receive most of their year's supply of grain but from every crop gathered a portion is given to the poor; otherwise there is no blessing from Allah.

When the sun has set upon the last day of Ramadan, there is great fantasie, feasting and singing and shooting just to make a noise. This lasts all night and on into the next day. Everyone is merry.

In the spring, when all is green and the pastures are clothed with flocks, the valleys also are covered over with growing grain and the hills are girded with scarlet anemone, blue speedwell, and golden mustard, we rejoice in Aid-el-Nabat, the feast of flowers, and celebrate the animals' festival. The milk of the flocks is given to the poor and aged, that they may have wherewith to make cheese. And the shepherds pour over the backs of their sheep a dye made from red soil.

◆

The gayest occasion of the Moslem year is in honor of Nebi Mousa (the prophet Moses). When he died, as you will remember, he was alone on Mount Nebo; an angel buried him and for more than two thousand years no one knew the place of his sepulchre. Then one Edh Dhahr had a dream. Mousa appeared to him, and told him that his body rested on the summit of Il Kassibil Ahmar, on the west side of the Jordan, not far from the northern end of the Dead Sea. He promised his blessing upon any who should come there to honor him. So Edh Dhahr built a mosque on the site. At the season when the Jews observe the Passover and Christians gather at Je-

All gather in the Sacred Enclosure of the Dome of the Rock

The procession passes from the city into the Kidron valley

rusalem to celebrate Easter, we Moslems go to our great feast, first up to Jerusalem and then down to Nebi Mousa. Each village sends a delegation. All go who can. Some of the men ride on donkeys or horses, and some go in the automobiles that run from Bethlehem and Nazareth to Jerusalem. But we women walk; we are used to long walks. And the older children go with us.

So on Thursday many village groups enter the Holy City, carrying banners and singing, accompanied by the music of pipe or flute, trumpet or drum. From every direction they come. All day long one hears the strains of instruments and of voices drawing nearer. The pilgrims stop at the home of some friend, perhaps a former villager now living in the city, or at some hostel or temporary shelter. Or having looked around upon all things in the city, they go out to a suburban village for the night. Best of all is it to stay at the shelters put up near the tomb of Nebi Dahoud, and now is the time when those who have made vows to this shrine pay them.

Friday, as I have told you, is our weekly day of prayer. On this Friday morning all gather in the Sacred Enclosure of the Dome of the Rock. Many of the boys and girls see the beautiful sanctuary for the first time, and hear the story of how it was built by Khalif Omar, to commemorate the night when Mohammed himself was caught up into heaven and brought to the spot, so that next to Mecca it is the most holy place in the world. They go inside and see the huge rough up-cropping of the rock over which the Dome was built, and listen again to the familiar story of Ibrahim's sacrifice of his son upon this mountain top, of Dahoud's later conquest of the city, and of the temple which Suleiman built here. Inside the enclosure are many other buildings, among them the throne of Suleiman, where he sat when his people came to him for judgment; and the beautiful arcades, called Mawazin (scales), where souls will be weighed on the Judgment Day.

At noon all kneel for prayer and a sermon is preached from the outdoor pulpit. Then the great procession begins. Leaving the enclosure by one of the northern gates, it turns toward the East and passes from the city into the Kidron valley, around the brow of the Mount of Olives, past Bethany, and down the long winding descent to Nebi Mousa.

Each group in the procession carries banners. Many sing and clap. Some dance before Allah as they walk. Others brandish swords or wave kerchiefs. Some orators ride on other men's shoulders and speak to the crowds whom they pass. Finally, preceded by a real band and guarded by soldiers, the Grand Mufti and his as-

Some dance before Allah as they walk

sociates, mounted on splendid horses, close the long line.

When the twenty-mile march is ended, it is time for prayer and the evening meal. All is arranged for the comfort of the pilgrims. The festivities last for a week, though not all stay so long. Vows made to Nebi Mousa are paid. Many parents bring their boys to be circumcised. Weddings take place. Every night there is dancing and singing; every day smoking, talking, and feasting. The men discuss religion and politics, for they are important questions in this land of three rival faiths, while the women talk of the life of their various villages and towns.

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We Moslems have no festival to commemorate Isa, although we believe he was the Spirit of God, as Ibrahim was the Friend of God, Mousa the Speaker of God, and Mohammed the Prophet of God. But our village lies not far from

Bethlehem and we often go there for the Christmas celebration. We choose the services of the Greek church rather than the Latin, for the Latin services are like the wedding of a widow, but the Greek like that of a virgin, full of color and music and splendor. Whichever it may be, the patriarch comes from Jerusalem, glorious in embroidered robes and jeweled mitre. Priests attend him, swinging incense. Other priests carry banners, and singing choir boys meet him and escort him to the ancient Church of the Nativity, built over the cave where Isa was born and the manger where his mother laid him.

* * *

The ancient Church of the Nativity

Now that our boys and girls are growing up, Mohammed and I have planned for their marriages. He has selected the husbands for the girls, but I helped decide upon the wives for the boys, because a woman can find out more about girls. Then, too, they come to my house and work for me, so I need to be satisfied.

Atiyet became the bride of A'hmud as had been arranged at her birth, and a fine bride she was, beautiful, strong, and a good worker. Her mother-in-law had nothing of which to complain. After she had given birth to a son, A'hmud died. Other men wanted to marry her, one of them a cousin of A'hmud. But she preferred to remain a widow in her husband's home and rear her child rather than leave him and go elsewhere, and Mousa and his wife were content to keep her.

One day when Mohammed and Shada had gone to the city, they saw in the market a young girl who was good to look upon. Shada loved her and said to Mohammed, "Get me this girl for my bride."

Now Mohammed was not pleased and when he told me, I was troubled. Who can know about a strange girl from another village?

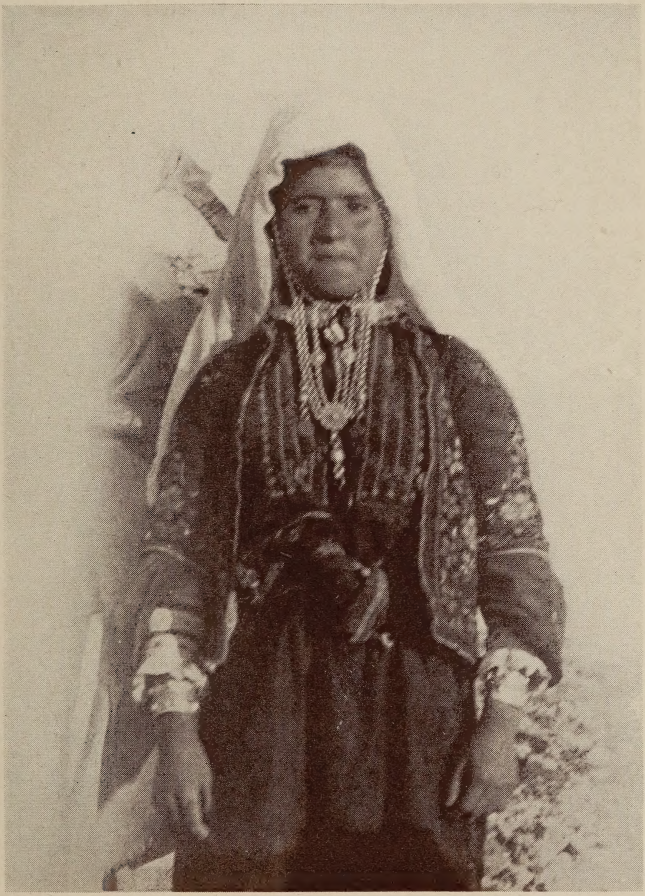
But Shada insisted, "Get this girl for me. I want no one else."

So Mohammed found out where she lived. We went together to her village, Mohammed riding on his horse, not too fast for me to keep up with him as I followed walking. He learned that she was Alaiya, daughter of Fareed, and belonged to a good family. He talked with Fareed, and I went to the house and saw the mother and the girl herself. We were satisfied. Later Fareed came to see us and Shada, and all was arranged.

Mohammed talked with his brothers and cousins to make certain that no one would object to his taking a bride from outside the family. They consented, but Fareed's relatives were not so gracious. Mohammed had to pay much for Alaiya, one hundred and fifty pounds to her father, ten pounds to her father's eldest brother, who is head of the family, ten pounds to a cousin who wanted her as a wife for his son, and a pound or more to each of several others who objected for one reason or another and had to be bought off. She was an expensive bride, but we could not refuse Shada anything.

There was great excitement in our village. The girls were very angry, saying, "Is there no one among us good enough to be the bride of Shada, son of Mohammed?" Their fathers asked Mohammed why he had done them this wrong, and the women quarreled with me for many days.

When the wedding day arrived, Mohammed sent a camel for Alaiya. Her father came with her, leading her camel, and many of their rel-



Atiyet—the bride of A'hmud

atives accompanied. The procession from our village went out to meet them. Shada and such other young men as could get horses raced back and forth over the fields along the road upon which the procession moved slowly. All went well until they neared the village. Then the women met them, an angry, raging mob, crying out, demanding why a stranger should come to their village. The men who were with her called out to her, "You have a sword in your hand. Protect yourself." And she who had sat like a statue, holding the sword in front of her veiled face, now sprang into life and brandished her sword right and left. She could not see; she touched no one. But the women fell back, their fiery jealousy giving way to fear and admiration, and they dropped into line behind the new bride, clapping and singing as they should do at a wedding.

Shada had loved Alaiya at first sight, but he had not seen her again. And she had never seen him. That is not unusual in our land. The discovery of each other was for them a glad one. Shada continues to love his wife and she is a good daughter, giving us children to make our hearts glad.

One of her sisters had a very different experience. She bore a child who was ugly even at birth. He grew more and more hideous to look upon; he had a dreadful voice; he was dull and stupid. He did not talk and run and play like other children, but acted like an old man. By the time he was three years old, the family knew that he was an exchange child, the child of the devil and not of his father. So his father buried him in a heap of manure, turning a basket over his head. Next he fired a gun several times to frighten the evil spirit, crying with a loud voice, "Come, take your child and give us ours." Then the child was taken out. If he had been covered with perspiration, the father would have known that the exchange had taken place; the mother would have bathed him; he would have lived and grown into a fine man; all would have been well. But his body was dry; his flesh cold; the evil spirit had destroyed him and he died. Praise be to Allah that we have had no such children!

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Her father came with her, leading her camel

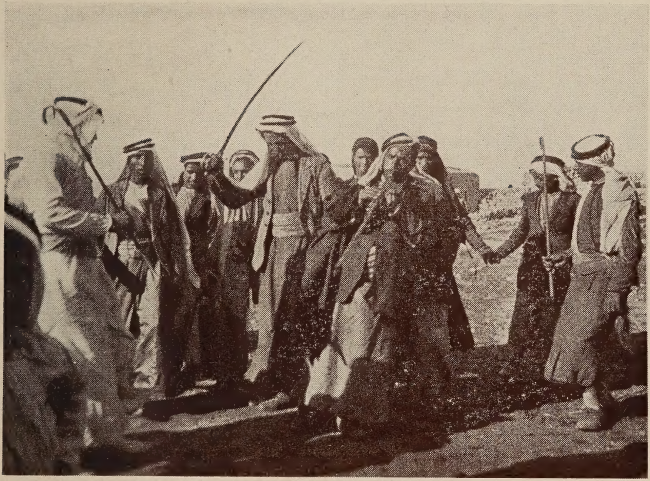
The women—dropped into line behind the new bride

Our Fatma we had named for the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed with the prayer that she might be as beautiful, as loyal, as capable as the one whose name she bore. And she did not disappoint us. She was a dutiful daughter to me and loved her father with great devotion, always eager to be with him and serve him. Often he told her stories. Her favorite one was of King Suleiman. He was so wise that he could speak the languages of all the animals. Every morning he gathered the birds for prayer and praise. Every morning the eagle came late. One day the king questioned the eagle, "Why do you always come late?" And the eagle made answer, "I have an old father, so old that he has no feathers; he is as bare as a piece of meat. While the other birds pass I must stay and protect my father, that none may peck at him. Then I come to worship." And the king laid his hand upon the eagle's head and blessed him, saying, "Such a noble son I will bless. You and all your descendants shall stay always young. You shall never lose your feathers. You shall mount up on your wings and never be weary. You shall soar and never faint."

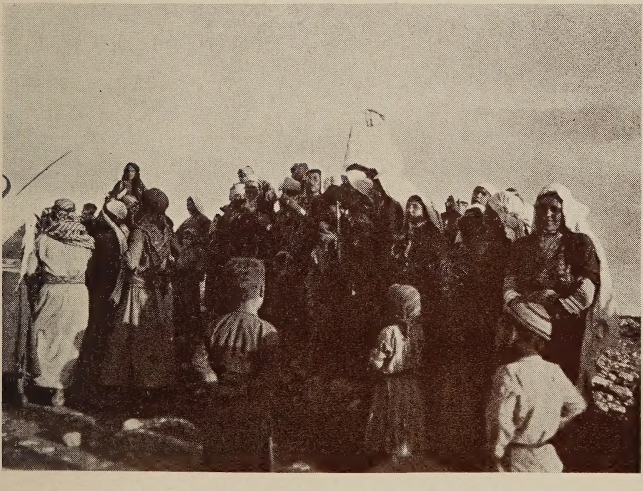
Even when a very little girl, Fatma made friends with everyone; she was so winsome and so kind. Many sought her in marriage for their sons. But Mohammed gave no answer, saying, "We will wait until Fatma is older. Then we shall choose the best."

She was twelve years old, when Salim came home. Now Salim was the son of Mohammed's cousin, Feisul. Twelve years before he had gone to America where he joined a relative who sold Oriental goods in New York; he had made much money. After six years he came back and married the girl to whom his father had betrothed him. She did not want to go so far from home; he wanted to make more money. So he went to New York leaving her with his mother. Often he sent her money, money for food and clothing and bright new gold coins to add to her necklace and her head-dress. A daughter was born after he left. Mohammed forbade his followers to make pictures or images of any kind, but Salim was so eager to see his baby that his wife took her to Jerusalem and had a little picture made to send him. Salim was not sorry that she was a girl; he said in America girls are just as valuable as boys! Another five years and he came home again, only to find that the child had died while he was on the ocean.

He had much money. He built a new house, the largest and finest in the village. There were four big rooms above, and places for the animals, store-rooms, and ovens below. One room was for his mother, one for himself and his wife, and the other two for his married brothers. His



Two men inside the circle danced



The women followed—singing

father was dead, and he said his mother might live with whichever son she pleased, or live alone if she liked that best, as widowed mothers do in America. His wife liked the new house and the new clothes and the money he gave her; but with that she was content. She did not want to go to America with him; neither did she want more children. She did not ask him to stay at home. She was glad not to have much work to do and she liked to have him make money. I think there are not many women so selfish as Zhur. Salim was patient with her. Had he been like most men he would have divorced her and sent her back to her father; but Salim is kind and generous.

When he knew how it was with her, he came to Mohammed and asked for Fatma for his wife. He would pay one thousand pounds.

He said, "There is no other girl like Fatma, so pretty, so clever, so good."

One thousand pounds! Who had ever heard of such a price for a bride? Mohammed should have half of it at once for himself, and the other half should be for Fatma's dower.

Mohammed said, "Fatma is too young. Wait for her a year or two."

Salim answered, "I cannot go back to America and leave her free. She is too attractive. Some other man will get her."

Mohammed promised, "We will betroth her

to you, but leave her with her mother until you come back again." And Salim agreed.

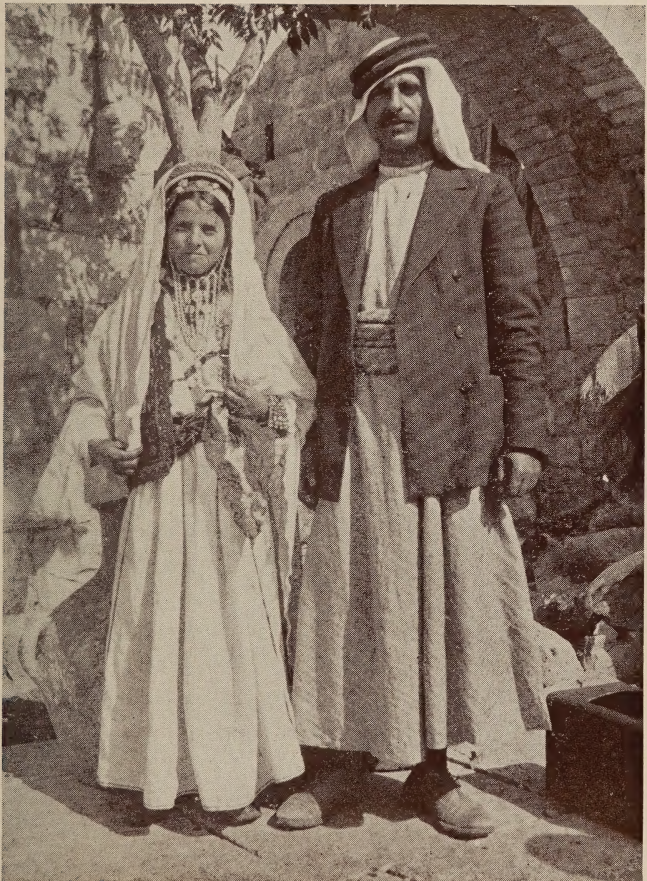
But when Mohammed told Fatma, she said, "No, father, I will marry Salim now."

She was proud to be the youngest bride in the village, to have so much paid for her, and eager for the new clothes and the dower Salim promised her.

Salim was pleased and said he would stay six months, and would marry Fatma before he left. He would go to New York just once more and then he would come back to care for the land and olive trees his father had left him and to beget and rear children. He would not take Fatma with him; she was too young. She might stay with her mother or live with his mother or with Zhur. Zhur would be good to her, for she was glad not to have her husband bother her any more. And he would not let Zhur be jealous; he would give her everything which he gave Fatma.

It was agreed and preparations for the wedding began. When Mohammed and Salim and I went to the city to buy her clothes and her dower, Fatma sat happily at home, singing as she embroidered the simple dresses.

One day when I bade her do some accustomed task, she looked up quickly and with a merry little laugh, she said, "But I do not have to serve you any longer, mother. I am Salim's bride."



Salim and Fatma

Yet she was my dutiful Fatma, and did what I asked.

Never had there been so gay a wedding or so big a feast in our village! Everyone was invited and professional gypsy dancers were hired for entertainment.

Salim took Fatma to his house, sending Zhur to stay with his mother for the first week. Then Zhur came back, and the three lived contentedly together. As the first wife, Zhur had charge of the work, but she was not unkind to Fatma and the child had less to do than in our busy house. When Salim left for two years in America he asked if she would like to come back to our house to stay and she said, "What? Go back to my father like a divorced woman or a childless widow? No." So she stayed to help Zhur and to care for his mother. Every one loves Fatma and is good to her.

Have I wearied you with my long story? Does our simple life interest you? To care for the land which has been our fathers'; to keep their names alive and honorable and their blood pure; to add to what they have left us that we may have enough to divide among our children; to live as they lived where they lived; and to follow what the Great Prophet taught: this is what we find good in life. This is the will of Allah for us. All is foreordained. No man by impatient striving can change his fate.

Palestine is a small country; it is rocky and much of the mountain land is barren, as you know. We must work hard for what we raise on the shallow terraces and in the narrow valleys. We walk over rough paths and climb steep slopes. We do not wish it otherwise. We want our boys and girls to grow up like their forefathers and not like western people. We do not want good roads to make it easy for them to leave home and for automobiles to rush into our village.

Our land is loved because of its past. Would you have come to see us if we were dressing and living as you do at home? If we do not guard the past, who will keep alive the spirit of the fathers, who will understand the sacred traditions of our three religions, the stories of Ibrahim, Ishmael, Isaac, and Yakub, of Isa and Mohammed?

Hamdilillah! (Praise be to Allah!) the God of our fathers and our God. May he be the God of our children! Inshallah! (God grant it.)

I thanked her and rose to leave. Sitte went with me to the summit of the hill, and as I turned toward Bethlehem, she parted from me with the words:

"Ma'assalame; tfaddal sharrifna. (Go in peace; and honor us again with your coming.)"

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